

JOHN GILDART



· · M. E. HENRY-RUFFIN · ·



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JOHN GILDART

An
Heroic
Poem



BY M. E.
Henry-
Ruffin



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TO
MY ALMA MATER
ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY, EMMITSBURG, MARYLAND,
WITH AN INSPIRING MEMORY
OF NATURE IN ITS NOBLEST PHASES,
AND WITH A REVERENTIAL GRATITUDE
FOR ALL THAT WAS ELEVATING
IN ITS INFLUENCE, PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE,
I DEDICATE
THIS WORK.

JOHN GILDART.

VIRGINIA! Beloved of the mountains! we
bend

To thy lofty-browed beauty in homage and
hail.

Superb in the cloudland, all majesty's awe
On the crown of thy crests shall not fail.

With their blush when the bridegroom sun
uplifts

With luminous touch, the morning's veil ;

On through the noonglow's throbbing sea,

When isles of purple shadow sail ;

Or flamed with the track of the sunset fire,

When the drooping torches of twilight trail ;

Or solemnly still for the silver step

Of the gliding moonbeam, pure and pale ;

The sunlight's shadow sanctified ;

The dead day's spirit purified.



“WHEN UP THE PATH, A HORSE AND RIDERS CAME; A MOUNTAIN FARMER
WITH HIS MOUNTAIN BRIDE.”
(See page 6.)

I.

A mountain way, a russet thread that wound
Ambitious from the valley's low content,
To cloud-embarrassed precipice. Midway
Beside the path, a modest cottage stood
As though it halted in its white repose,
Nor higher wished to dare. The sunset flames
Had faded to the ashes of gray eve,
When up the path, a horse and riders came :
A mountain farmer with his mountain
 bride :

The cot their quiet goal. Their steed forgot
The steep ascent and double burden, when
He took the air of home into his breath.
John Gildart gave him rein—happy to feel
The nearness of his home ; happier still,
The clasp of two dear hands ; happiest of all,
That Ruth and home and happiness were his.

Just as the quiet beehive grows aloud,
With all its buzzing life, at the first crash

Of honey-seekers, at the horseman's tread,
The cottage broke from stillness into sound,
Kinsman and friend and neighbor welcoming
John Gildart and the bride he brought across
The Carolina border.

To the door,

Last, slowly tottering, two age-bowed forms,
And John said gently : "Father, this is
Ruth!"

And still more gently : "Mother, this is
Ruth!"

The girl's sweet eyes so sought a welcome in
Their faces, that the old man's heart, straight-
way,

Went after John's ; the mother, too, almost
Forgave her usurpation, when she spoke.

And then was swept the merry human tide
Back to the cottage and the feast began :

The wedding merriment of mountaineers.

While Ruth sat pondering at the cordial
board,

Her eyes and thoughts going from face to
face,

Trying to hide the wonder that they all
Were unfamiliar ; then remembering who
Was at her side, she sent her brave, true smile,
A gentle messenger, unto his friends,
And won her place among them.

Through the night,
Upon the silver silence of the hills,
The little cottage flashed out like a gem,
With all its gleaming windows to the sky.
And when the stars went out beyond the
night,

To call Aurora from behind the heights,
And bid her bring the morning, one by one
Left friend and kinsman, for their homes,
or up,

Or down, or o'er the ceaseless crests. And
Ruth,

Enthroned by love, with gentle conquest, took
Possession of the kingdom of her home.

Home coming ! Strange rite that breaks
and that binds
One life, in all that in life is the best.
O faith of a woman ! how fate ever finds
For her feet a new threshold, her heart, a
new rest.

Or cottage or palace or peasant or queen,
She knows, as she greets the strange portals,
her reign
Has begun ; her throne mounted ; or
mighty or mean,
Love-sceptred, the home is now her domain.

O ! the brave faith that falters not, step-
ping firm o'er
Into the new life ; and whether it send
Sunlight or shadow across the strange
door,
The veiled future is met, like the face of a
friend.

Peaceful the tranquil mountain days that
 wound
Into weeks, like an untroubled stream, nor
 saw
The rocks that wait to wreck its happy
 course.
The summer died ; and autumn's faded court,
That came in crimson splendor, shivering
 left,
Then winter's white kiss rested on the
 hills,
Until they felt the warmer lips of spring.
And as the year began its fresh young
 life,
Came the fruition of a hope, a great
New joy to Ruth ; a great strange pride to
 John ;
And over all the smiling hills was known
No prouder father and no happier wife,
No more important patriarch o'er the
 hills,

No wiser grandame through the valleys
found,
Than John and Ruth and the old sire and
dame,
When friend and kinsman gathered once
again
To give their welcome to the new-born son.
All through the blossoming Spring, day after
day,
Ruth sat before the cottage, with her babe,
Her eyes now on her needle, now upon
A moving speck far down the hillside, that
She knew was John. And sometimes, los-
ing him
In the blue ether of the fields below,
The girl would stand, shading her love-sweet
eyes,
To follow surer where her thoughts had led.
Then finding him, would hold her baby up
High in her arms, as some brave soldier
might

Uplift the standard of his fealty,
For friend to recognize ; and loyal John,
Down in the valley fields, would look and see
Saluting heartily the living sign.
Then Ruth would drink the nectar in the
 air,
That flooded all the April-haunted crests ;
And worship in her simple woman's soul,
The wondrous, sacred beauty of the hills ;
And feel her spirit lifted up to meet
Their ancient mystery ; yet all the while
Resting her heart upon its own repose.

Within the cot the old man sat and read,
And the old mother's ceaseless needles shone,
As the gray worsted took a shape and grew.
Then when the self-assertive clock began
To reach its longer hours, sweet Ruth would
 leave
Her vigil at the door and place her boy
Upon the sheepskin at the old folks' feet.

There he would look as wise as wisdom's self,
Receiving with all due complacence then
The wonder and the pride they both bestowed

So artlessly upon him ; willing, too,
To share approvingly their faith, that he
Was marvellous beyond all babyhood.

While Ruth's light step went on in busy
way,

Speeding the simple noonday cheer for him
Who climbed the mountain track, his heart
aglow

With thoughts that ran like heralds of the
feast

That waited him in Ruth's dear greeting and
His baby's kiss.

So sped their happy days.

So speeds the wild bird's flight, with urgent
wing ;

Nor sees the coming shot that soon will
lower

Its aerial life ; and wounded, leave its hours
Of ether, panting moments in the dust.

II.

Slowly, but with a saddened certitude,
Into Ruth's simple mind the knowledge grew
That John was bearing all alone some weight
Of painful doubt, some burden deemed too
great

For her ; and Brutus' Portia never strove
With gentler patience to unlock his lips ;
More lovingly rebelled 'gainst the unfair,
Unequal bond that gave her no due part
Of wifely sympathy in every need.

All through the later summer days and
through

The briefer autumn light, John labored on,
Heaping the ripened corn that amber shone
About his barn ; heaping the mellow hay,
Upon whose spicy waves the summer's heart

Throbb'd out : sheafing the royal, sun-rich
wheat

Into pale golden promises of bread ;
A kingly largesse, meant to conquer want :
Labored and strove as if the hunger fiend
Pursued him, or the tyrant greed had bound
Him to a ceaseless servitude. And Ruth,
Keeping sad wonder from her lips, would
seek

The meaning of the toil that robbed his days
Of peace, devouring all his restful sleep
With sodden weariness. Her hands would
ask,

In loving touches and each mute caress
Was eloquent with tender inquiry.
At last the grain was harvested, and heap
On heap the sheaves were gildèd, mailèd
hosts

Armed for a victory, 'gainst winter's dearth.
Then when the fields no longer claimed his
care,

John made swift journeys to the county
town ;
But left within it none of all the weight
That burdened him. And when Ruth
watched at eve,
The twilight mountains, all their magic
failed,
To see him come, so weary, brow-bent, home.
Long through the night, when wonder ban-
ished sleep,
She heard the old man's voice, as he and
John
Balanced some weighty question. Once she
heard
John's eager voice, in sad decision rise :
"O father ! I must go ! for you, yourself,
Would not forbid me," and a sigh was all
The old man's answer. Through the hours
that cry
Deadened, in Ruth's sad sense, all other
sound,

“O father ! I must go !” “Whither ?” she
asked,

The terror that could only tell her, John
And she must part.

And yet the answer came.
Too soon ; yet still it came. One ashen eve
That shut the autumn light from view, John
rode
Brow lower bent and drooped with heavy
thought,
The stalwart form upon the sober steed,
That took his master’s mood. John slowly
rode
Back from the valley town, where law and
news
Were equally distributed ; rode up
The russet mountain track, now musical
With crisp brown leaves. And never seemed
his home,
Such heart’s repose, as in the fading light,
The little cottage smiled in white relief

Against the purple, evening-shadowed crests.
The mountaineer's strong heart, with yearning faint,

Noting the sweet, familiar form that stood
Upon the threshold waiting him ; and to
His wistful gaze, a guardian presence seemed
That should have shielded that white home
from harm.

Silent, he took their baby from her arms ;
And led her to the cottage ; silent, stern,
The strong heart seeking for its stolen
strength,

Before it trusted treacherous speech. Beside
The fire, the old man and his mother sat,—
And borrowed from its glow the warmer
life

That left their veins with youth.

John speechless stood
Before them, holding still the babe, as if
Somehow it helped him in this saddest strait
To look upon his boy, remembering,

He now must pledge the answer that the
years

Would ask him in the manhood of his son.
The deep lines on his face, without a word,
Answered the old man's sadly seeking glance.
The mother's needles ceased their industry ;
The age-unsteadied hands folded at rest,
Prefacing resignation's need. Ruth crept
Closer to John ; and pressed an earnest hand
Upon his arm, sending him in the touch,
Her full heart's meed of wifely sympathy.
Was that her John speaking in that new,
tense,
Self-trampled voice ?

“ Father ! Mother ! Ruth !

My baby boy ! We are so happy in
Our little home. The great hills, towering
stand

About us like strong sentinels, to guard
The lives beneath their solemn shade. So far,
So high in heaven's smile, our quiet home.

That all the clamors of the noisy world
Are only breathless whispers, when they
climb

Our peaceful altitudes. There sometimes
comes

A summons, in the whisper, faintly clear,
That no man's soul can shrink from answer-
ing.

However far away, however faint,
The echo of that call, it must be heard—
And it has come to me. Virginia calls
Aloud to all her manhood, and shall I,
Child of her brave old hills, not heed her
voice?

True, I am far away; and none would
seek

A simple farmer in his sky-pitched home
In these defiant hills. But can I hear
My Mother-State, in silence, when she cries
In all her need, to all her sons? No! No!
What answer give the future of my boy

When his young manhood asks : ‘ And where
were you,
My father, when our country called ; and all
Virginia’s sons responded ? ’ O my wife !
Our little year has been so plentiful
In happiness, so soon to close ; but, Ruth,
You would not bid me linger to prolong
The happiness that might grow bitter to
The coward consciousness.”

Ruth sought to speak ;
But the strong pain rose up and slew her
voice.

“ Father ! Mother ! My boyhood’s proudest
dream

To reach the day, when all my fresh, young
strength

Could take your burdens, only leaving you,
A peaceful sense of life’s secure decline,

Is broken with the later dreams for Ruth

And for my boy. Why say I more ? The
sharp,

Clear sound of battle rings through all our
land ;

And every true man's arm is lifted now,
To guard our Southland ; and shall I remain,
In faint security, with craven heart,
Barter for base-browed ease, the lifted front
Of manhood, in the peril of our peace ?
Two voices called, my country and my home.
O Ruth ! my wife ! but Him, Who made us,
knows

The struggle sore to tell which voice to heed.
For the strong arm I meant to be your shield,
Could not be nerveless, in Virginia's need ;
And that it might not blindly, traitor prove
To either cause, my country or my hearth,
I multiplied its strength, for many a day,
In your behalf, to fortify our home
Against the season, I must dedicate
Unto my country. So the long, dark days
Are shielded all from want. Then, while I
give

My arm in battle for our brave old land,
No thought of any dear one needing it,
Shall steal its strength. And now, my home
secure,

I listen to the other voice that called
Against my hearthstone, and in answer,—
go.”

Ruth's voice that died in her first terror,
rose

To meet John's troubled gaze, that spite of
all

His courage-covered words, sought her reply,
To give them life. As though his eyes
asked : “ Must

I go ? ” her tones rode over sobs to say :
“ I cannot bid you stay. ” The father laid
A feeble hand that met the mother's touch
In silent blessing on the bended head ;
And all the long contested doubts were done.

Now came the busy, thoughtful care of all,

The soldier's needs ; and Ruth bowed low
Unto the shadow weighing down her heart,
And took her part in brave activity.
Oh that to-morrow ! when he would be gone.
Oh those to-morrows ! when he came no
more.

They crowded round, like dread and ghostly
forms,

To chill her purpose and her courage slay.
O trembling hands ! that steady seek to
grow,

In loving last remembrances. O love !
So fearful to behold yourself in truth,
As one might dread the mirror, when disease
Had blotted recognition out. O night !
Whose long dark hours, so heavy-hearted,
crushed

Out sleep, outweighing rest, you bring at
length,

The morning, mocking with its heartless
smile,



“ HE SADLY KNELT ; AND LIKE AN ANCIENT HIGH PRIEST, OFFERED UP HIS SACRIFICE.”

(See page 25)

The farewell, falling on the little home,
The doom of all its joys.

A thousand dawns
Seemed coming o'er the crests, when day
began ;
And through the autumn glory of the hills,
And o'er the path that led a golden way
To the bright valley, John rode slowly down
And went to battle.

Half way down the hill,
He paused, a backward glance bringing again
The dear home to his heart, he sadly knelt ;
And like an ancient High Priest, offered up
His sacrifice ; not tithe, but best and all,
The treasury of simple life and love.

O God ! Who made us, Thou canst rate
Our shallow strength and sorrow's
might ;
For Thou, our Father, Thou art great ;
And we are helpless in Thy sight.

We lift the fainting will to Thee
That falls beneath life's dread alarms ;
Thy strength must shelter it and we
Rest in Thy mercy's mighty arms.

My little home ! it is so small
A spot upon Thy great world's breast,
That eyes less tender would not fall
Upon it ; Thine on it shall rest.

O God ! when I am far away
In battle, in Thy guardian sight,
I leave my home ; there let it stay,
Safe in Thy mercy and Thy might.

All through the empty hours, day by day,
Ruth sought beyond the ethered distance
some
Reprieve from that dull death, that seemed
to cling
About her, deadening every sense ; and all

The autumn heights a desolation made.
How fare the days whose weight o'erpress
our strength ?
How speed they, when our fainting lives
refuse
To give them motion ? 'Tis an impetus,
Beyond, above our power, impels the
hours,
Too sorrow-laden, to be borne alone ;
And in divinely secret way, they slip
Into the great, devouring past ; for when
The soul is sick with anguish, blankness
comes
Like merciful unconsciousness to pain.
And so Ruth's days took their own time and
passed ;
While all her household claims were vaguely
heard
And answered ; as the sick man takes his
draught,
Accepting it as portion of his dream.

When its hope is dead
And its lustre fled,
The heart has a memoried, ghostly crown ;
For the sky will hold
The sunset gold,
When the golden sun has drifted down.

When music that filled
Life's sunshine is stilled,
A shadowy tone through the night will
ring ;
When the song is dumb,
And silences come
The unforgetting echoes will sing.

Yea ! it passes by ;
But it cannot die,
The soul of joy's refulgent rays :
No sky so dark
But keeps a spark
Of splendor from sun-haloed days.

Ah! doubly blest
The joys that rest
In benediction on our ways ;
For the gleams they give
Shall oft relive
To haunt and hallow darker days.

III.

With brief delay, within the valley town,
To learn the seat of action, John rode on.
He saw his native hills, like turrets, lean
Against the purple ramparts of the sky.
The autumn air had left its keenest blade
Upon the heights of home ; and now the faint
Breath of the lowlands greeted him. The
fields,
Fearless of earlier mountain frosts, were yet
Unharvested. The corn no longer climbed
In varied, ripening circles round the crests ;
But spread a level feast unto the far

Horizon, undulated only when
The tasselled plains bowed stiffly to the
wind.

The mimic canvas city of the camp
Was all alive with martial, morning stir,
When on his sober steed, John Gildart came.
The smile begun at his unmartial air,
And weary self and steed vanished at sight
Of the set soldier look upon his face.
And later, when he stood equipped, in all
His mountain manhood, not a voice was
heard
To question that a brave man came to
war.

“Your name?” the Captain said, as brief
as though

Words were to him as bread in famine time.

“John Gildart, sir.”

“Your home?” and when he named
The hidden hamlet far behind the hills,

The Captain smiled, forgetting, too, the
need

Of saving language, asked :

“How did you know,
In that remote retreat, there was a war?”

“I heard it on a Court-Day in the town,
And straightway thought a war must be
the call

For every true man’s arm ; however far
He may be from its face ; and if my home
Was too remote for war to find me, I
Could find the war ; and, Captain—I am
here.”

The Captain paused his pen, about to place
John Gildart in the ranks. One rapid
glance

Went searching o’er the mountaineer’s tall
form.

“You may be color-bearer. Sergeant, see
To it.” A brief review, but still he kept
John’s simple heroism in his mind,

Against the trying days of blood. They
came.

In every desperate charge, unshuddering,
John Gildart and his flag were at the front.
So once, they told, when bullet-pierced, his
leg

Hung lifeless down, he caught a musket up,
From a dead comrade, on it, staff-like, leaned
And flung his fearless flag.

And when they said,
Those solemn surgeons in the hospital,
The color-bearer's marching days were o'er,
They reckoned not the day, when next they
marched,

John Gildart and his flag still led the front ;
The color-bearer's step a little halt,
But not one halt in his high-beating heart.

Thus nigh a year, busy with blood, had
passed,
Yet not a message came to him from Ruth,

No echo from the home so far behind
The azure-distanced hills. Her thought be-
came
The clinging comrade of his waking hours,
The centre of his dreams. Still patient,
hoped ;
Remembering the well-filled barn ; nor
dreamed
Of danger possible, after the hours
He filled with loving toil, forearming her,
He surely thought, against all coming harm.
No neighbor came from that sequestered spot,
And to the simple dweller of the hills
The wingèd mail was all a mystery.
And yet, his heart cried out, in breathing
space
Of battles, for a word from Ruth ; but then,
He hushed it with the hope of that near day,
When battles done, and new peace sweeter
grown,
In lurid light of unforgotten strife.

O tender blindness ! that our vision veils
And sightless, smites the future searching
eyes.

O hope ! forecasting in a golden guise,
The days beyond, we cannot call our own.

The year had almost wound its circle when,
One autumn eve, John sat before his tent,
In the short silence of the frenzied field.
Beyond him stretched the recent battle-
ground,

With all its dead unburied. Here and there,
The cannon stood, like iron memories
Of that dread day's fatality. And John,
Turning his carnage-sickened thoughts, from
all

War's thronging horrors, let them rest on
Ruth.

"My wife ! Thank God ! so far away and
safe

In that dear home that seems like Paradise,

After a day like this. I never look
On battles but I think of Ruth and say :
Thank God ! she is so far away and safe !”

Just then a shadow fell across the light,
Grown feeble in the dying of the day.
With glad surprise, John saw the face
Of his next neighbor in his mountain home ;
As though his yearning thought had con-
jured up,
Like incantation, forms familiar to
That dear and distant spot. Then scarce
could John
Give greeting to his neighbor, till he sought
Tidings of Ruth.

“ And Ruth, my wife, is well
And happy and the little home is safe ?”
The neighbor’s voice was stayed as though
it felt
The wound it gave. “ She’s had sore trouble
since



“ JOHN SAT BEFORE HIS TENT, IN THE SHORT SILENCE OF THE FRENZIED FIELD.”

(See page 34)

You left us, John." The color-bearer
blanched.

Trouble to Ruth ! after he strove so long
Forearming her. Never, by battle shock,
Was John's strong heart so shaken as it now
Sank at his neighbor's words. His pleading
look

Asked for the more, his voice refused to
seek.

"The old folks," said the mountaineer, and
paused

Before the blow, "'tis better quickly told,
They died two months ago ; but one short
week

Between their going. Then the barn was
burned.

Nothing was left of all your harvesting,
The winter was a hard one even for
The farmer well provided. Ruth kept on
With silent courage that right well might
shame

Many a sturdy man. Your little one
Grew strong and bright, as though it almost
throve
On misery ; and Ruth kept bravely on.
But your girl's heart was stronger than the
frame
That held it." Here John's painful breath-
ing came
In gasps of agony. Both hands besought
A speedy close to anguish of suspense.
"And she is ill, so ill the women drove
Me down the hills to find and tell you, John.
The neighbors came to aid Ruth ; but the
miles
Between them make their kindly care but
brief ;
And hunger, want and death are at your
door."

Frenzied with one compelling purpose, John
Broke from his neighbor's side to find the tent

Of his commanding officer. The guard,
Barring his entrance to the General,
Gave stern rebuke for breaking on the rest
The leader sought after that trying day.
“What matters his permission?” thought
 poor John.
“He would not grudge me one short visit
 home,
After my year of fighting; and he would
Not—no—he could not—bid me stay, when
 Ruth,
My wife, so needs me; and—I cannot wait.
I came unsought, willing and glad to come.
But now—O God! my wife!—my Ruth!
 how can
I stay? And when he knows how great her
 need,
He will not blame me—but I cannot wait.”

And so the watching stars, that night, beheld
The eager color-bearer and his friend,

As far they left the camp, in distance lost,
And set their faces to the nearing hills.

Upon the roll next morn the Adjutant
Found, "missing," unexplained, beside
John's name ;

When days passed on nor brought him back
to camp,

Nor search discovered when or why he left,
The paper, where the swift, condemning pen
Had laid its fatal stroke, went on its way
Unto the General ; and as he read,
Thought of the thinning ranks and of the need
Of sharp reminders to the failing hearts ;
And scowled upon the record, where beside
John Gildart's name, the word "Deserter"
stood.

Better than herb or healing ever known
In doctor's lore, the sight of John's brown
face,

An all-subduing remedy to Ruth.
Her eyes drew in the happy truth, her hands
Mute witnesses of the white waste of pain,
Sought over and again their eager proof.
Supported in that dear security,
Her shaken spirit sank, from all its toils,
To slumber velvety. When potent draughts
Of sleep had roused the stunned vitality,
John held the strengthening hours with
 many a tale
Of battle and the angry days of blood.
While Ruth would lay a chiding hand to bar
The hasty words that forced their way, when
 John
Looked on his smoldering barn, the holocaust
Of all his toilsome hope, the ashen ghost
Of all the promises of plenty, he
Created from his busy, thoughtful love.
Then Ruth would lead the bruised remem-
 brance back
To restful fancies ; bringing him their boy,

And bidding him behold how sturdily
The doubting baby feet would tread alone
Their wavering steps, till John forgot all else,
Beyond his cottage door ; almost forgot
How bitter was the taste of trampled hope.

And now the fragrant steps of spring ascend
From the soft valleys to the sterner heights.
Now beats the summer's quickening pulse
 through all
The grain life of the hills ; and once again
John Gildart spends his hours of earnest toil
And gathers wages of the harvest gold.
Once more the resurrected barn is filled ;
Once more the promises of plenty guard
His home ; and Ruth has won back health
 in those
Dear, helpful days, that brought him to her
 side.
Up from the valley came his brother's wife,
Widowed by war and shelterless by fire,

And found a tender welcome at Ruth's
 hearth.
The last home need now vanquished, loyal
 John
Turned to that other call, that sacred seemed,
And kissing Ruth, went to the battle's front.

O haunting face ! rest long and dwell
 In eyes that look their last on thee.
O trust ! now taking thy farewell,
 Of all thou never more canst be.

O stately crests ! bend graciously
 Your beauty to his clinging gaze ;
That look your homage shall not be
 Again through all your lofty days.

O brave old hills ! close round his heart ;
 And home ! rest in it tenderly ;
Long years shall pass, ere shall depart
 Such love and loyalty from ye.

IV.

Three brief November suns had palely set
And when the fourth arose, John Gildart
came

Into the camp. Many a field was fought
And lost since last he stood in those now thin
And shrunken ranks. The comrades he had
known

Now coldly greeted him ; and marvelling,
He stood before the grim old General
While all the camp was busy questioning
How the deserter had been found at last.
The General looked at John, then at the page,
Whereon the stubborn, proof-compelling
words,

“Gildart, John, Deserter,” stood.

“And so

They brought you back !”

“I came unsought, unforced.”

The stern commander smiled, or gave the
ghost

Of smiling. "Ah! you thought to throw
yourself

Upon our mercy, knowing well that soon,
Even your mountain refuges must give
Their hidden traitors up."

"My strong, old hills
Are not the haunts of traitors; and their
heights

Are brave men's homes," and in John's
face

The quick, defending blood uprose. "I am
No traitor. If I left the war, no call
On earth, save one could make me leave—
my wife.

I swore to stand between her and all harm,
As long as life. A thousand men were at
Your call; but I alone to hear her cry
Across the hills; and could I stay, when she,
My wife, ill and alone, so needed me?"
But plead as honestly, as earnestly
As only honest, earnest John could plead,

The dread court-martial met. And when he
told

His simple story in his heartfelt way,
They paused,—those solemn judges in that
court,

Where stern death seemed presiding officer ;
And their tribunal, gravely they adjourned,
For dreary days, to weigh his plea against
The heavy charge upon him, while to John
The knowledge seemed at first impossible,
The truth too hard to bear, that the strong
trust

That led him, like a child, away, could mean
Desertion and a most dishonored doom.

Ah ! would they never understand, those
stern,

Rebuking officers, how all his months
Of absence held the thought of his return ?
Desertion ! when he came to war unsought.
Desertion ! when he only crossed the hills
To battle against death for Ruth. And so

John plead and told his heartfelt history,
Till hopeless days began to drag all hope
Out of the earnest spirit ; and until
The simple story grew too pitiful,
He almost scorned himself while telling it.
Why should he speak of that dear home and
Ruth

To men who made a treason of his love,
Desertion of his loyalty ? So thus
The color-bearer sullen grew and mute.
The tender story was more coldly told.
The earnest tone that spoke the faithful will
And almost turned the rigid law of war,
Grew passive and indifferent. Could he
Bring forth his honest heart that judges
might,

With iron words, to silence beat it back ?
The waning hope that still upheld his hours
From utter darkness, fainter grew at each
Adjournment of the court martial ; and still
They lifted not the heavy charge, nor loosed

The fetters that degraded him. Thus, when
With cruel stroke it came, John's shrunken
state

Felt not the blow that would have crushed
him down

In his uplifted past. It fell at length—
The heavy sentence of his doom to death.
The merciful delays that strove to break
The iron letter of the law were o'er ;
And now no power of tenderness could
bend

The rigid penalty that martial law
Had meted out to John—a coward's fate—
Death for desertion—and a volley fired,
At sunset, ten days hence, straight at
The heart that never held disloyalty.

The eve of that stern day, John Gildart
moved

Up to his prison bars and whispered out
To the grim sentinel : “ May I not send

Home for my wife ?” And when permission
came,
Fearing to startle Ruth with cruel news,
He bade them tell her that the fighting done,
And he at rest, wished her to come at once
Without delay to camp.

Ruth Gildart heard
The summons on her heights one August
morn ;
And rising up she took her baby’s hand ;
And happy, side, by side, they walked be-
neath
The summer hills to find the camp and John.
Waited the color-bearer in his cell,
For that last look, as all that held him now,
To sight and sound of all that we call—life.

The pilgrim sun shall sail away
Over each coming, crystal day—
Drift down, sweet sun !
And fade sweet sky !



“HE TOLD HIS SIMPLE STORY IN HIS HEARTFELT WAY.”

(See page 45.)

The race is run
The goal is nigh.
In all the ages thou shalt see,
Forever must I be blind to thee.

The spring shall speak with timid voice,
Till summer's richer notes rejoice,—
Cease, tender song!
I touch the deep
Decline of long
And toneless sleep.
Ah! sweet and soft as thou canst be,
Forever must I be deaf to thee.

When call the summer's song and sun,
'Mid answering hearts, the silent one.
O loving trust!
No more reply
The voiceless dust
Gives thy keen cry.
How swift and strong that cry may be,
Forever must I be dumb to thee.

4

V.

Oh it was a wonderful, butterfly world !
How rich he would be could he hold
In the grasp of his tiny arm, unfurled,
All the wealth of their wings of gold !

And it was a wonderful blossom world !
Must he hurry and say good-bye
To the laughing faces of flowers uncurled
At his feet that over them fly ?

And oh ! what a song that robin sings !
And oh ! how the river can run !
How the sky outspreads its fleecy wings,
To melt in the molten sun !

So chattered on Ruth's boy in that new world
Beneath the hills as swift they journeyed on,
With childhood's artless avarice, 'mid all
The largesse of the summer bountiful.
And happy in his happiness, Ruth stayed

Her eager feet, to watch his breathless chase
Of butterfly and bird ; and held him near
Her heart, when tired out of fruitless hunt.
Then all the summer shone within her soul,
As nearer came the welcome that they
 sought,
She and her boy, from that strong heart that
 held
Them in its tender strength. She marked
 his grace,
Her sturdy boy, and proud uprose the
 thought,
How true an heir he was to all the health,
The great hills' heritage ; how true a son
To him, a mountain manhood had so dower-
 ed.
And oh, the warm, bright August in her
 heart,
When they should meet, John and his boy,
 and she
Stand in the glowing summer of their love.

They climbed, one eve, a gentle hill and
stood

An hour before the sunset, on its crest.

“O mamma! see! the soldiers and the
tents!”

Cried little John, with merry clapping
hands.

Ruth sank in silent, prayerful gratitude ;
For there, down in the valley meadow just
Beneath them was the camp. An hour be-
fore

The sunset. In the amber light of eve,
The white tents rose and fell in snowy
mounds :

While all the armèd ranks, by distance
dwarfed,

Were but as dragon-flies, invisible,
Save for their glitter. Then a bugle tone,
The spirit of a sound that died and rose
Again, before it perished, came to them
An hour before the sunset.

Ruth sat down,
Remembering the many miles she toiled ;
And found the weariness she had not found
In former haste. But, now, there was the
camp
And John ; so she would rest an hour and go
To him, with no sign of her toilsome way
To hang about her and to mar her joy.
Yes ! she would rest this hour, thinking
how long
The twilight to the highlands clings ; its
soul,
Lingering and lost, among the hills of eve.
So rested tranquilly and watched her boy,
This hour before the setting of the sun.
The moments glided onward, drop by drop.
The downward sun was lessening, step by
step,
The distance of the day. No sound came up
To break the heart of silence on the hill,
Save when her boy would shout aloud to find

And follow some belated butterfly.
Now he came sobbing to his mother's side,
And showed her how his gaudy prize was
 crushed
And beautiful within his conquering grasp.
Possession's fatal blow to all the grace,
Illusion gives to credulous desire.
Ruth comforted her boy, and checked his
 tears,
And kissed away their traces, bringing back
The baby dimples, John would love to see.
And now rose up to seek him.

 As she stood,
Choosing the gentlest path, for baby feet,
A cannon poured its single, solemn note
Upon the empty air ; and then she saw
The sun pass down beyond horizon's bar.
The light was taken prisoner by the dark ;
And the deep voice had bidden day farewell.
The hour had passed. It was the sunset
 gun.

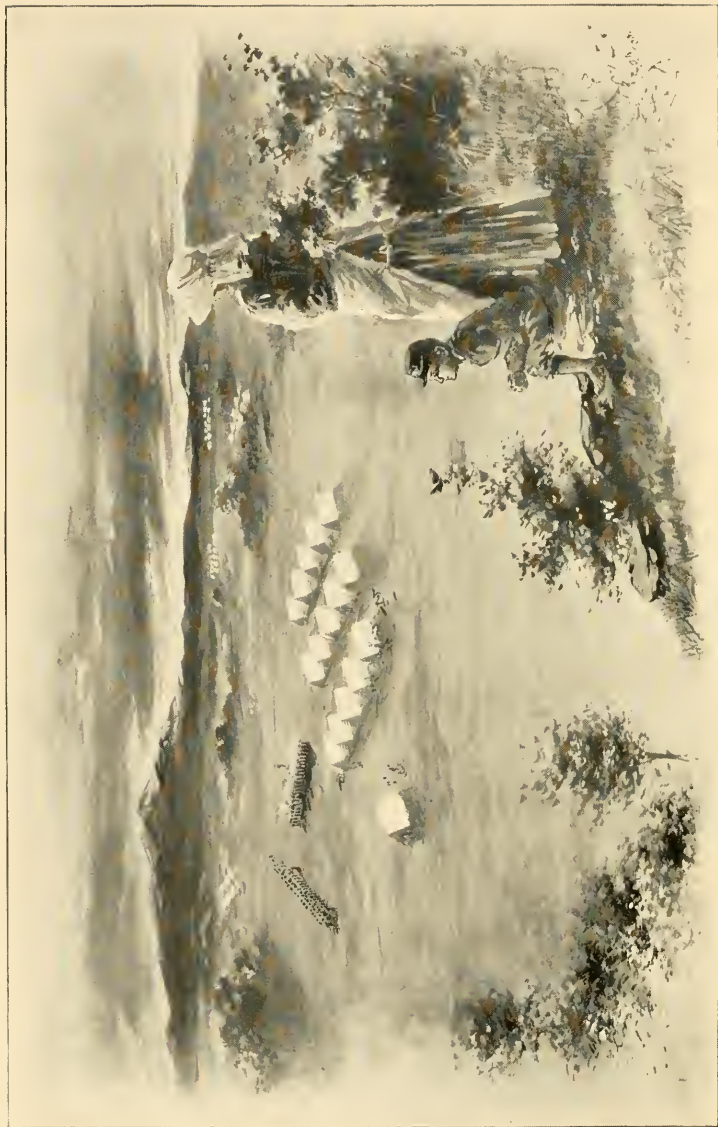
As we pause to leave the day at eve,
And watch it lovingly out of sight,
A deeper day may steal away,
And life drift down to a deeper night.

As we bid good-bye to each sunset sky,
In our sigh unconscious tears may dwell ;
All the crimson and gold that life can
hold,
May be fading away their own farewell.

O sunset sky ! O days that die !
Ere ever again ye lift the night,
Beyond the brink of dawn we sink,
Beyond the borderlands of light.

VI.

A shadow at his door, the General
Looked up and met an eager, searching gaze.
A woman stood before the tent. Her dress
Told of her mountain home, as did her high,



"THERE STOOD ERECT A SINGLE FIGURE THAT MIGHT BE A MAN."

(See page 55.)

Free grace of movement. From her face,
 The bonnet, falling back, a picture showed
 Of hope sincerest. From the grave, blue
 eyes,

The shining soul of happiness went forth
 With every glance. A little rosy boy,
 A blossom of the sunhigh hills, was at
 Her side.

“ I came to seek my husband, sir.”

It might have been, “ my king,” so proud
 the tone.

“ What is your name ?”

“ Ruth Gildart, sir.”

“ And his ?

No—not—”

“ My husband is John Gildart, sir,
 A color-bearer in your ranks. I came
 Across the hills as quickly as I could.
 They said he wanted me ; that he was free
 From fighting now.”

“ Yes ! yes !” the General said ;

And whispered to his pitying soul : “ Yes !
Free !

Forever free ! as one who hears the last
Command ; obeys it ; while obedience
Is death.”

“ They said that I could come to him ;
And you, kind sir, will tell me where to find
My husband now.” The General’s stern
eyes

Fell from her gaze and sought the fatal
page,
Whereon his hand had signed John Gildart’s
doom.

He looked at Ruth. Then started up ; and
then sat down.

“ What did you say—John Gildart
—why

There must be some mistake ; and are you
sure,

Quite sure—that was—what is your hus-
band’s name ?”

“John Gildart, sir;” the voice was very
sweet ;
And sweeter still the puzzled face that
turned

To answer him. Again he looked. A great,
Strong pity stifled him. How could he tell
This happy girl, that out beyond the camp,
A still, dark soldier lay, with lifted face
Sightless to the stars ? Oh God ! how could
She smile and ask in that proud voice,
For him ?

“ Will you not tell me, sir, where I
Can find John Gildart ? ” But the General
Shrank from the tender eyes that smote his
soul.

Ruth sat and waiting his reply, she faced
The officer. He brought a sterner tone
To battle with the pity that well nigh
Had conquered him.

“ Why should you wish to see
So cowardly a man, as we have proved

Your husband was ? He left the camp, with-
out

A furlough, and on some pretext that you
Were dying ; and it was the very eve
Of our most fatal battle ; but he saved
His coward's life to lose his honest name ;
And coward and deserter now is proved."

Ruth Gildart rose. She strove in vain to
speak ;

But the fierce pain smote voice and utterance
dumb.

A million cruel echoes seemed to pour
Into her hot indignant heart, the words
The General had hurled at her. Her John
A coward ! a deserter ! And must she
Stand silent, in the face of calunny
Like this ? She strove to speak. A little hand
Tugged at her dress. Her baby's pleading
tone :

"O mamma ! come and see ! Please, mamma,
come !

I want to see the soldiers. Here they
come !”

Ruth blindly followed, glad to leave the
tent

That seemed a sinful place, since she had
heard

The slanderous words ; and glad to breathe
again

The sinless air.

The night was nearer now
Than when she reached the camp.

She stood in doubt

A moment, wondering. And where was
John ?

Only within his arms could she forgive,
Forget that moment's cruelty. Now must
She hasten on to seek him ere the night
Made her search hopeless, in that tented
town.

Tent after tent, she peered into, and sighed
To find no face like John's. Her baby's step

Grew heavy as her heart with fruitless
search.

“Where is my soldier papa?” ’twixt two
sobs

The question came. “Hush! baby dear,
for soon

We shall see papa.” Through her words of
cheer

The undertone of disappointment came.

The rows of tents stopped here, and still

No trace of John.

She looked beyond the camp,
Into the open space, where she had watched
The shining muskets, just an hour ago.

The field was quiet now. The sound of
arms

And tread of soldiers faded to the peace

Of camp at twilight. Still Ruth wandered
on.

A group, small, dark, almost indefinite,

Stood at the meadow’s limit. To her gaze,

Their attitude of quiet waiting seemed
To draw her near ; and as she moved, her
 steps
Were driven onward, by some impetus
Unseen, but more than felt.

 Breathless, she paused,
Without their circle. On its edge, surprised,
The kindly soldier faces greeted her.
A heavy silence hung upon the men,
And almost hushed the question on her lips.
No answer came, as Ruth looked eagerly,
From soldier unto soldier, paling there,
Before her question, as they had not paled,
Before the battle's shock.

 The solemn beat
Of rugged words, the soldier-preacher's tone
Was broken as Ruth's voice arrested him ;
While every man started and looked aghast,
To hear John Gildart sought for at that
 hour.
And every moistened eye instinctive fell

Upon the ready grave, its waiting guest,—
The form that blanket-covered slept,
Silent and veiled and nameless, while she
spoke.

But in that shuddering pause, the waiting
blow

That strong men could not strike, a baby
hand

At last sent sudden down ; for little John,
Peering about the soldiers and their arms,
Touching with tiny fingers, swords and
guns

Came to the nameless burden that was laid
Before the open grave. With playful touch
The fearless baby fingers lifted up
The awful drapery of death. Ruth sprang
To chide her boy ; and drawing near she saw
The form and features of the unveiled dead.
An instant's anguished recognition came.
Her search was ended and John Gildart
found.



“THE FEARLESS BABY FINGERS LIFTED UP THE AWFUL DRAPERY OF DEATH.”

(See page 64.)

Shriek after shriek, to shuddering echoes
tore
The heart of peace that beat upon the
night ;
And all the soul of starry silence fled.

As after autumn's storms, to woodland
comes
The winter's snowy hush, on Ruth's wild
grief,
The softness fell of white unconsciousness.
From that deep sleep, she rose to walk beside
The still, tall form, upon the wagon borne ;
The stalwart color-bearer's last sad march.
And so she brought him home across the
hills.

Oh ! anguish of that second " coming home "
To Ruth, remembering the happy first.
There rested he amid the solemn heights ;
And there Ruth dwelt through all her wid-
owed days.

A shadow over all the noble hills ;
A shadow over all the little home ;
A shadow over all her empty life.

I.

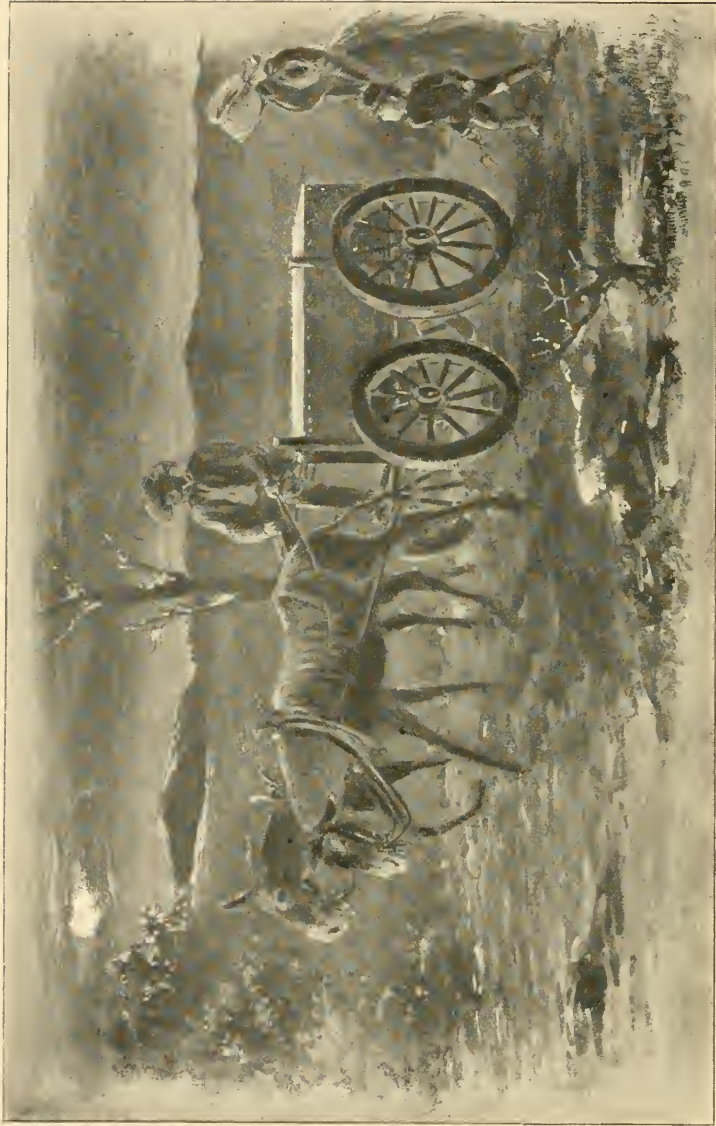
O hills ! that held his heart, now keep
His spirit 'mid your dauntless crests ;
And prouder rise, while he shall sleep ;
And statelier that here he rests.

II.

Let not the lying shot that hushed
His heart, a living witness be.
O loyal hills ! the life it crushed,
Was yours, the steadfast and the free.

III.

And silent be the fatal word,
By which he fell ; but tenderly,
From crest to crest, be clearly heard
His brave and gentle fealty.



"AND SO SHE BROUGHT HIM HOME ACROSS THE HILLS."

(See page 65.)

IV.

Then rest! strong heart! in thy home
hills :

Thy mountain mother's memory
Claims all thy lofty life and fills
Her unforgetting heights with thee.

FINIS.

REUNITED.

(Written after the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878.)

PURER than thy own pure snow,
Nobler than thy mountain's height,
Deeper than thy ocean's flow,
Stronger than thy own proud might,
O Northland ! to thy sister land,
Was late thy mercy's generous deed and
grand.

Nigh twice ten years the sword was
sheathed ;
Its mist of green o'er battle-plain
For nigh two decades spring had breathed ;
And yet the crimson life-blood stain
From passive swords had never paled,

From fields where all were brave and some
had failed.

Between the Northland, Bride of Snow,
And Southland, brightest Sun's fair
Bride,

Swept, deepening ever in its flow,
The stormy wake in war's dark tide.

No hand might clasp across the tears
And blood and anguish of four deathless
years.

When summer, like a rose in bloom,
Had blossomed from the bud of spring,
Oh! who could deem the dews of doom
Upon the blushing lips could cling?

Who could believe its fragrant light
Would e'er be freighted with the breath of
blight?

Yet o'er the Southland crept the spell
That e'en from out its brightness spread,

And prostrate, powerless, she fell,
Rachel-like, amid her dead.
Her bravest, fairest, purest, best,
The waiting grave would welcome as its
guest.

The Northland, strong in love and great,
Forgot the stormy days of strife ;
Forgot that souls with dreams of hate
Or unforgiveness e'er were rife.
Forgotten was each thought and hushed,
Save she was generous and her foe was
crushed.

No hand might clasp from land to land !
Yea ! there was one to bridge the tide ;
For at the touch of Mercy's hand,
The North and South stood side by side.
The Bride of Snow, the Bride of Sun,
In Charity's espousals are made one.

“Thou givest back my sons again,”
The Southland to the Northland cries.
“For all my dead, on battle-plain,
Thou biddest my dying now arise.
I still my sobs, I cease my tears,
For thou hast recompensed the anguished
years.”

Blessings on thy every wave !
Blessings on thy every shore !
Blessings that from sorrows save !
Blessings giving more and more !
For all thou gavest thy sister land,
O Northland ! in thy generous deed and
grand !

ST. PATRICK'S BEACON FIRE.

THE ship by Innis Phadruig stands, the Isle
That Patrick's name has hallowed since the
Saint

Trod as a benediction on its sands.

Then many an isle and little port and bay,
The Saint's ship touched, till where the bend-
ing Boyne

Bows till abased, self-lost, within the sea.

They tarry. Forty days the watching crew,
With fast and prayer, held the golden hours.

O vernal promise ! mingling with the tide

Of Patrick's gospel, filling all the land,

As sun and song and blossom fill the spring.

On Tara's Height, a glory yet ungleamed,

This Resurrection Morn. The mystic fire

That fed the Druids' faith, by Loagare's tent

ST. PATRICK'S BEACON FIRE. 73

Shall have another mystery. Eternal steps
Are on thy hills, O Erne ! to-day.

Thy Saint, thy Message comes ; and never-
more

Shall fade the flower springing on his track,
The Flower of Faith, his Erin wears as full,
As fragrant still, as when it leaped up free,
On green Magh-Breagh, that Easter memor-
able,

In that bright year, Loagare was King and
held

O'Nial's throne, his grandsire famed in song
Of bards, " O'Nial of the Nine Hostages."

The Court at Tara met. The sacred fire,
The sovereign's sole right was blazing forth,
The royal flame, proclaiming far and near,
The Council of the Nobles and the King.

And instant death was his who durst to light
A beacon fire, in sight of Tara's Hill,
While burned the royal blaze and Council
met.

“But see!” the Druids cry unto the King,
“Yon fire of sacrilege.” Upon the banks
Of Boyne, a tent. Before its open door
The daring light of beacon fire forbid
The limits of the Land of Breagh.

“A sign!
O King!” the Druids wail, “a fateful sign!
Bid yonder blaze be instant quenched. What

say
The prophecies? A deadly and dark word
For thee, Loagare. ‘When burns a blaze
before

The beacon of the King, the hand that held
The daring torch shall hold thy land as well.
And never, age on age, shall pass away,
The power of him whose beacon burns be-
fore

The beacon of the King.’ Forevermore!”
The Druids wail, “unless he instant die,
Shall he be sovereign of our land of Erne;
And never other King, the Erseland own.”

So King Loagare bade hasty messengers
Summon the builder of the impious fire
Before the Court and Council of the Druids.

“ Let none arise ! ” the monarch gave com-
mand,
As all the Court impelled to reverence,
Moved at the coming of the gentle Saint.
Close after him, in loving humbleness,
A noble convert followed, Sessnen's son,
Benignus, young and eager in new faith,
Leaving the heirdom of all Meath, to join
His steps with Milcho's stranger slave.

But Erc,
The tall, strong son of Deago, rose upstraight
And bowed in Patrick's sight ; the impetus
Within, impelling stronger than the word
Of King Loagare, forbidding reverence.

Then all forgotten was the daring fire
Of sacrilege, as Court and King and Queen,

ST. PATRICK'S BEACON FIRE. 76

Druid and Bard and Warrior owned the spell
Of that strange Message, captives to the
faith.

Dubtach, the master soul of song, the bard
By King Loagare, the best beloved, swift
taught

His Druid harp, the melody of Christ.
And never fell, in battle, fierce and fast,
The vanquished from the Irish swords, as
fell

The ancient creed of Erne, at Patrick's word.
Just as the land, the dear and green sweet
land

He loved, laid off the winter's snow, at touch
Of spring's first smiling, finding emerald
garb

And richest gems beneath, so fell from
Erne,

As swift away, the Druids and their day.
So melted fast into the warm, true light
Of Christ's own love, the little Isle of Saints.

ST. PATRICK'S BEACON FIRE. 77

O that first Easter Morn on Tara's Hill !
O springtime ! in that ancient shamrock
land.

We tread the centuries to meet again.
We bring the picture back to loyal faith—
The Court of King Loagare, on Magh-
Breagh's plain—

The witchery of spring—the song of thrush—
In hawthorne hedge or hid in ivy wall—
We fill the picture of that Easter Morn—
And Patrick coming with the fair, young day.

But lo ! a stronger voice comes thrusting
through

The widening waste of ages—stronger still,
The voice of prophecy. O wailing priests
Of Baal ! the fire of Druid faith has paled
Before the greater light in Patrick's hand.
Still may your wail grow into prophecy
Fulfilled ; and Patrick's daring fire before
The beacon of the Council of Loagare,

L. of C.

ST. PATRICK'S BEACON FIRE. 78

Proclaim another Everlasting King,
Our Erin's only monarch ; and His reign
Shall never perish ; for our land of Erne
Is Christ's own kingdom, won that Easter
Morn,
For faith eternal, by her deathless Saint.

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